

**Operating Procedure for Worcester Division of the Probate and Family Court  
Under Standing Order 1 – 21, effective July 12, 2021**

A. General information:

Effective July 12, 2021, the Probate and Family Court will be open to conduct all emergency and non-emergency court business in person, except for the matters identified in Paragraph C below and any matter that a judge determines shall be held virtually.

The ability to conduct in-person hearings depends upon successful compliance with all safety protocols established by the Trial Court, including, but not limited to, Trial Court occupancy limits.

Parties may file pleadings by US mail, in person, or by e-filing where available. Email filings will be accepted when done so by a Court Service Center staff member or by an attorney volunteering through a Lawyer for the Day program on behalf of a self-represented litigant or if specifically authorized by the Supreme Judicial Court or the Executive Office of the Trial Court. Other email filings may be allowed at the discretion of each Register of Probate. Drop boxes may be available to file pleadings in some court locations.

Effective July 12, 2021, the Worcester Probate and Family Court Lobby will no longer be accepting email submissions unless specifically authorized by the assigned Justice, JCM, AJCM or Sessions Clerk, and only in circumstances where E-Filing or in-person delivery is not possible. The Registry will accept email filings only in matters of emergency, or as provided for by the standing order, as noted above. Filings may be sent to the general email address of [wpfc@jud.state.ma.us](mailto:wpfc@jud.state.ma.us) and will be reviewed by assigned Registry Staff.

For cases that cannot be E-Filed, attorneys and litigants may also file pleadings by mail or in-person with the Registry.

Please see attached Directory for all contact information.

A drop box will continue to be available at the security station at the main entrance of the building and at the counter at the Registry for the benefit of those individuals who wish to hand-deliver pleadings or other documents for filing. Please contact the Registry for instructions as to the hand-delivery of filings for hearings scheduled within 48 hours before the assigned Justice. Questions related to the drop box may be emailed to [wpfc@jud.state.ma.us](mailto:wpfc@jud.state.ma.us).

The drop box will be checked twice a day by the Registry Staff and will be accessible to attorneys and litigants for the filing of pleadings within 48 hours of the scheduled hearing or when pleadings are not otherwise able to be E-Filed.

Please see attached Directory for all contact information.

Electronic signatures will continue to be used, consistent with the current order of the Supreme Judicial Court, unless and until otherwise amended by subsequent orders or rules.

Virtual registries may continue to be used. Virtual registries offer all of the assistance normally available during an in-person visit, including face-to-face contact, the ability to obtain and get assistance with court forms, and access to court documents and docket information. [Information about virtual registries can be found here.](#)

The Virtual Registry will continue to operate Monday through Friday, 8:30am – 4:00pm. Information about E-Filing is available on the Virtual Registry. The contact Registry Staff is Lynda Hammond and questions may be directed to Lynda at: [lynda.hammond@jud.state.ma.us](mailto:lynda.hammond@jud.state.ma.us).

The link to the Virtual Registry is:  
<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/worcester-probate-and-family-court-virtual-registry>

Please see attached Directory for all contact information.

#### B. In-Person Proceedings:

As of July 12, 2021, the Probate and Family Court will expand the scheduling of in-person hearings for all matters, except for the matters identified in Paragraph C below and any matter that a judge determines shall be held virtually. In-person hearings will be scheduled for the next available date and will be conducted on a staggered schedule.

Staggered scheduling for Worcester Probate and Family Court will be updated as available.

Please see attached Directory for all contact information.

If notice has already gone out and a matter is scheduled for a virtual hearing on or after July 12, 2021, the matter will still be held virtually unless the assigned judge determines the matter should be heard in person and the parties are notified of such change.

Where an in-person hearing is scheduled, a party may request that the hearing be conducted virtually, and the judge will rule on the request.

If a matter is scheduled for an in-person hearing and a party would like to request that the hearing be conducted virtually instead, the request must be filed with the Court and notice must be provided to the opposing party. The request will be delivered to the assigned Justice, upon filing, for determination. Unless the matter is scheduled on an expedited basis, any request for a virtual hearing should be filed as soon as possible after a notice for in-person hearing is received, but not less than 7 days prior to the scheduled hearing.

Please see attached Directory for all contact information.

Alternatively, a judge, upon request, may authorize a participant (an attorney, party, or witness) to appear virtually while other participants appear in person, so long as it is consistent with due process and fundamental fairness. A participant who requests to appear virtually for an

otherwise in-person proceeding shall have no grounds to object to other participants appearing in person.

All requests to appear virtually for a scheduled in-person hearing shall be filed with the Court, with a minimum of 7 days advance notice to the opposing party. The assigned Justice shall decide the request in advance of the scheduled hearing in accordance with the Standing Order.

Please see attached Directory for all contact information.

### C. Virtual Proceedings:

The following matters shall be held virtually and on a staggered schedule:

1. Uncontested adoptions, unless the assigned judge determines that the matter should be heard in person;
2. Uncontested divorces;
3. Rogers reviews;
4. Best efforts § 29B annual reviews – DCF custody;
5. Any action involving child support only, except for contempt actions;
6. Case Management/Status conferences; and
7. Discovery motions.

Changes to staggered scheduling for virtual matters in Worcester Probate and Family Court will be updated as available.

Please see attached Directory for all contact information.

Matters that are generally handled administratively (e.g., marriage without delay; joint modification); uncontested/assented to motions (e.g., appointment of GAL; continue date of hearing; file marriage certificate late); and uncontested/routine allowables in probate actions (e.g., informal petition; transfer of guardianship or conservatorship from another state; accounts; appointment of GAL; license to sell; alternative service; waiver of sureties; motion to file death certificate late) will continue to be handled administratively. If such a matter is not handled administratively, a virtual hearing will be scheduled.

In the absence of exceptional circumstances, as determined by the judge conducting the hearing, no party or attorney for a party may be physically present in the courtroom for a scheduled virtual hearing.

However, in cases with one or more self-represented litigants, judges shall consider the possibility that self-represented litigants may have limited access to the technology needed or limited experience with such technology and either assist the self-represented litigant or offer the option to appear in person.

A judge may also consider matters through an administrative review process and determine motions in accordance with Rule 78.

Generally, the following matters are considered for allowance administratively:

- Motions to Continue
- Assented-to Motions to approve QDRO
- Motions to Waive GAL
- Motions for Instructions filed by GAL
- Matters for Determination Pursuant to Rule 78
- Other matters in the discretion of the assigned Justice

Please see attached Directory for all contact information of the JCM/AJCM and Sessions Clerks.

D. Protocol in the event of a court closure by the Trial Court:

In the event the Courthouse is closed, please go to:

mass.gov

<https://www.mass.gov/orgs/probate-and-family-court>

for information as to the closure. If courthouses are closed, all court business and court hearings are cancelled and will be rescheduled by the Court. If the Chief Justice of the Trial Court determines that matters can proceed virtually and that information appears on the mass.gov website, counsel/litigants should email the Sessions Clerk and the out-of-office email will give further details of the status of the hearing.

Please see attached Directory for all contact information.

E. Contact Information:

Emergency phone number	1-833-91COURT (1-833-912-6878)	
Emergency email address	wpfc@jud.state.ma.us	
Registry phone number	(508) 831-2200	
Probation contact	Chief Probation Officer, Lisa Wong	<a href="mailto:lisa.wong@jud.state.ma.us">lisa.wong@jud.state.ma.us</a> (508)831-2290
Judicial Case Manager	Kathleen C. Brown	<a href="mailto:kathleen.brown@jud.state.ma.us">kathleen.brown@jud.state.ma.us</a> (508)831-2208
Assistant Judicial Case Manager	Susan Walton	<a href="mailto:susan.walton@jud.state.ma.us">susan.walton@jud.state.ma.us</a> for Judges Keamy and Tetreau (Tierney) (508)831-2254
Assistant Judicial Case Manager	Alicia Doherty	<a href="mailto:alicia.doherty@jud.state.ma.us">alicia.doherty@jud.state.ma.us</a> for Judge Sushchyk (508)831-2241
Assistant Judicial Case Manager	Fionnuala Girard	<a href="mailto:fionnuala.girard@jud.state.ma.us">fionnuala.girard@jud.state.ma.us</a> for Judges Bailey and Melia (508)831-2223
Assistant Judicial Case Manager	Lana Simmons	<a href="mailto:lane.simmons@jud.state.ma.us">lane.simmons@jud.state.ma.us</a> for Judge German

		(508)831-2202
Sessions Clerk	Christian Kobel	<a href="mailto:christian.kobel@jud.state.ma.us">christian.kobel@jud.state.ma.us</a> for Judge Bailey (508)831-2235
Sessions Clerk	Ann Porcaro	<a href="mailto:ann.porcaro@jud.state.ma.us">ann.porcaro@jud.state.ma.us</a> for Judge Melia (508)831-2249
Sessions Clerk	Kelly Amaral	<a href="mailto:kelly.amaral@jud.state.ma.us">kelly.amaral@jud.state.ma.us</a> for Judge Tetreau (Tierney) (508)831-2211
Sessions Clerk	Amy Sliwoski	<a href="mailto:amy.sliwoski@jud.state.ma.us">amy.sliwoski@jud.state.ma.us</a> for Judge Keamy (508)831-2251
Sessions Clerk	To Be Determined	For Judge German
Head Administrative Assistant	Elaine Henderson	<a href="mailto:elaine.henderson@jud.state.ma.us">elaine.henderson@jud.state.ma.us</a> (508)831-2231
Judicial Assistant	Moirra Dacey	<a href="mailto:moira.dacey@jud.state.ma.us">moira.dacey@jud.state.ma.us</a> for Judges Bailey and Melia (508)831-2215
Judicial Assistant	Martha Hidenfelter	<a href="mailto:martha.hidenfelter@jud.state.ma.us">martha.hidenfelter@jud.state.ma.us</a> for Judges German and Sushchik (508)831-2233
Judicial Assistant	Eleanor Bianca	<a href="mailto:eleanor.bianca@jud.state.ma.us">eleanor.bianca@jud.state.ma.us</a> for Judges Keamy and Tetreau(Tierney) (508)831-2206

F. Additional Information:

Consistent with the SJC Rules and Trial Court Safety Protocols, all persons entering the Courthouse facility, whether fully vaccinated or not, will continue to be required to wear a mask that completely covers the nose and mouth at all times while in the building and while present in the Courtrooms. Plexiglass will remain in place in all Probate and Family Court courtrooms. Air purifiers have been placed in the witness area of each of the Probate and Family Court courtrooms. At the direction of the presiding Justice, the witness may lower their mask during testimony. The presiding Justice may, in his/her/their discretion, direct other requirements for in-person hearings in order to maintain the safety and well-being of staff and all persons appearing before them.

For information regarding the remote Lawyer for the Week Program, offered through the Worcester Court Services Center, please contact Brittany Raposa, Pro Bono Coordinator for Community Legal Aid, at [braposa@cla-ma.org](mailto:braposa@cla-ma.org).